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# The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

## Apotheosis

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

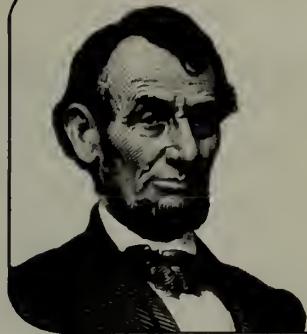
From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# Apotheosis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Apotheosis** (from Greek ἀποθέωσις from ἀποθεοῦν, *apotheoun* "to deify"; in Latin *deificatio* "making divine"; also called **divinization** and **deification**) is the glorification of a subject to divine level. The term has meanings in theology, where it refers to a belief, and in art, where it refers to a genre.

In theology, the term *apotheosis* refers to the idea that an individual has been raised to godlike stature. In art, the term refers to the treatment of any subject (a figure, group, locale, motif, convention or melody) in a particularly grand or exalted manner.



# Lincoln Lore

September, 1980

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.  
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1711

## BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865 The Sentimental Counterattack

Politics provided subject matter for the satirical artists of Lincoln's day, but satire was never the dominant motif in popular prints. Sentimentalism dominated American taste—even highbrow taste. Pro-Lincoln cartoons and simple portraits to be hung on parlor walls answered the satirists while Lincoln was President. After he was assassinated, there was no need to answer the critics. They were completely silenced, and an enormous sentimental counterattack swept them from the field—virtually forever.

The last issue of *Lincoln Lore* focused mostly on the satirical vein in graphic art in Lincoln's day. This issue dwells on the sentimental strain which prevailed in popular depictions of Lincoln after April 15, 1865. The prints shown are all part of an exhibit entitled, "BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865." It will be on view in the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., through March, 1981.

The only really respectable art, popular or otherwise, in the Victorian era was sentimental in content. Satire had at best a marginal respectability. Even humorists as great as Mark Twain ran afoul of the genteel tradition as late as the end of the nineteenth century. In Lincoln's day joke books were sold more at train stations than by respectable booksellers. As the previous issue of *Lincoln Lore* showed, Lincoln's own reputation for wit was something of a liability.

The graphic arts do not lend themselves to subtle interpretations of events. Subtlety is the realm of the word. In the pictorial and popular view of things, John Wilkes Booth was the tool of the devil, and angels carried Lincoln to heaven. There he was greeted by George Washington. When printmakers needed non-controversial images, they could always turn to religion and to the Father of His Country. The immediate association of Lincoln with Washington was remarkable.

Lincoln's association with him was possible because the Civil War had saved the Union Washington had founded. It was the sort of association that a printmaker wanted to make only when it was a safe bet. Although there are many prints of Washington and Lincoln together, none bears a date before 1865. Statesmanship on a par with George Washington's was truly within the ability only of dead politicians.

Another part of the sentimental counterattack which had lasting effects was the development of what might be called the "Cult of the First Family." Lincoln never realized the power of this, and the printmakers were surprisingly slow to do so. When they caught on, however, they launched a phenomenon now visible at every newsstand and grocery store check-out counter in America, as glossy magazines vie with each other to blazon forth color pictures and pulp stories about the President's wife, children, brothers, sisters, mother, and father.

The printmakers' slowness to provide the sentimental public they served with a suitable portrait of the First Family (the term was not used in Lincoln's day) was in part due to the old problem of models to copy. President Lincoln never posed with his whole family for a photograph. His wife was rarely photographed and was never photographed with her husband. Only in February, 1864 did Lincoln and his son Thomas sit for a charming portrait which provided a model for numerous scenes of domestic bliss.

Lincoln's failure to provide good models to copy was only a part of the problem. The printmakers were apparently unaware of the potential market for family scenes. Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln raised Abraham from age nine to maturity and outlived her stepson, but it never occurred to anyone to go out to Coles County, Illinois, and photograph her until after her stepson was killed. Knowledge of Lincoln's family was hard to



SATAN TEMPTING BOOTH TO THE MURDER OF THE PRESIDENT.  
COURTESY OF THE WARREN LIBRARY

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. The simple view of the assassination.



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 2. Lincoln was carried to heaven . . .**

come by. Even when a printmaker copied the photograph of Lincoln and his son Thomas, the print was entitled, "Lincoln and His Son Thaddeus"! Tad was the boy's nickname, bestowed on him by his father, who thought he looked like a tadpole (with a large head and small body) when he was a baby.



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 3. . . to meet George Washington.**

After the assassination the printmakers caught on quickly. They invented the family portraits which Lincoln had never provided in life. Starting with the photograph of Lincoln and Tad, they added other family members from other individual portraits. When they did not know what a family member looked like, they sometimes turned his head away from the viewer and dressed him as a typical little boy from some English Victorian print.

The urge to have America's Presidents domesticated proved to be strong in Victorian America, and an abundance of family prints appeared just after Lincoln's death — many of them crude, some grotesque, and all the products of printmakers' imaginations. The popularity of these pictures could not be ignored — nor could their unstated political message: could this good family man in his Victorian parlor really be a threat to American liberties? President Ulysses S. Grant would calm any anxieties that he might prove to be a dangerous "man on horseback" by appearing in numerous family portraits.

The unskilled crudity of most of the family prints is as much a comment on the demand for domestic art as on the infant stage of America's graphic arts industry. These prints were long on love and short on technical skill, but they are eloquent



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 4. Lincoln and "Thaddeus."**

testimony to the reverence Americans held for Lincoln — eventually. They were also responsible for discovering a nearly unquenchable market for pictures of the President's family, a market that has not been saturated to this day.

The printmakers' association of Lincoln with George Washington was also prophetic. Before the twentieth century, educated opinion ranked Washington first and Lincoln second among American Presidents. Even John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary and biographer, typified this thinking in 1904, when he wrote, "If we accord the first rank to Washington as founder, so we must unhesitatingly give to Lincoln the second place as preserver and regenerator of American liberty." In polls of historians taken in 1948, 1962, and 1968, however, Lincoln ranked first and Washington second in all three.

Poll of 55 Experts by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., 1948

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. George Washington



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 5. Sometimes Tad became Willie.**

3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
4. Woodrow Wilson
5. Thomas Jefferson
6. Andrew Jackson
7. Theodore Roosevelt
8. Grover Cleveland
9. John Adams
10. James K. Polk

Poll of 75 Experts by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., 1962.

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. George Washington
3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
4. Woodrow Wilson
5. Thomas Jefferson



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 6. Willie's portrait is on the wall.**



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 7. Mary's legs appear to be very short.**

6. Andrew Jackson
7. Theodore Roosevelt
8. James K. Polk Tie
9. Harry S. Truman
10. John Adams
11. Grover Cleveland

Poll of 571 Historians by Gary M. Maranell, 1968.

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. George Washington
3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
4. Thomas Jefferson
5. Theodore Roosevelt
6. Woodrow Wilson



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 8. Note portraits of George and Martha Washington.**



LINCOLN AND HIS FAMILY.

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum.

FIGURE 9. A grotesque Lincoln family.

7. Harry S. Truman
8. Andrew Jackson
9. John Kennedy
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From "The Evaluation of Presidents: An Extension of the Schlesinger Polls," *Journal of American History*, LVII (June, 1970), 104-113.

There were no public opinion polls in Lincoln's day, but the popular prints provide a sort of barometer of public opinion. Their direct legacy to us, Lincoln's incomparably high reputation and the Cult of the First Family, even anticipated public opinion. Their indirect legacy is a rich and vivid documentation of the social and political currents of Abraham Lincoln's era.



From the Louis A. Warren  
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FIGURE 10. Lincoln was taller than Washington.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The Illinois State Historical Society is seeking proposals for papers, or sessions, to be delivered at the Second Annual Symposium on Illinois History, December 4-5, 1981. Papers, or sessions, will be considered on any aspect of the history, literature, art and culture, politics, geography, archeology, anthropology, and related fields of Illinois and/or the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. The Symposium will be held in Springfield.

Individuals who wish to submit proposals should send a three hundred to six hundred word summary, along with resumes of intended participants, to:

Roger D. Bridges, Director of Research  
Illinois State Historical Library  
Old State Capitol  
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Proposals must be received by April 15, 1981. Individuals will be notified of the Committee's decision by June 1, 1981.

Members of the Symposium Committee are Robert M. McColley, University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign, Chairman; G. Cullom Davis, Sangamon State University; Raymond E. Hauser, Waubonsee Community College; Victor Hicken, Western Illinois University; Wilma J. Lund, Illinois State Board of Education; and Robert E. Sterling, Joliet Junior College.

## CALL FOR LINCOLN PAPERS

The Abraham Lincoln Association is seeking papers for its Ninth Annual Abraham Lincoln Symposium, which will be held on February 12, 1982. Proposals for papers dealing with Abraham Lincoln should be submitted no later than June 1, 1981, to Roger D. Bridges, Chairman of the Symposium Committee, Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

Springfield's annual symposium on Abraham Lincoln is the premier Lincoln event in the country. Each year the leading scholars in the Lincoln field gather in Lincoln's home town to deliver or to listen to the latest findings in scholarship. The symposium is free of charge, and all interested Lincoln students should make an effort to attend. The papers are always worthwhile, and the opportunity to mingle with other like-minded people is not to be missed.

The symposium is followed in the evening by the annual dinner of the Abraham Lincoln Association. This is always a gala event and makes a fine conclusion to the day. To be sure of receiving the announcement of the symposium and the dinner, join the Abraham Lincoln Association. Individual memberships are available for fifteen dollars. Membership includes a subscription to the *Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, a handsome journal published annually. Requests for membership or for additional information should be directed to Mr. William K. Alderfer, Secretary, Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

## A Correction

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The letter came in a lot of genuine materials, and I carelessly accepted the owner's identification of the author. I spent all my effort trying to figure out who the recipient of the letter was and what book it referred to. Mr. Spears closed his letter by saying, "I wonder who Charlie and Lew really were?" Do any of *Lincoln Lore*'s other knowledgeable readers know?

M.E.N., Jr.

## CLASSIFIED INSIDE

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# CITY/STA

## Expert: Lincoln's martyrdom made him

Abe also helped himself  
reach Washington's level

BY DOUG POKORSKI

STAFF WRITER

To modern Americans, Abraham Lincoln and George Washington are linked as two of the fundamental symbols of this country. But it took Lincoln's assassination, and the myth-making that accompanied it, to forge that link, according to Lincoln expert Harold Holzer.

Holzer, who has co-written or edited several Lincoln books, was a featured speaker Wednesday at the 19th annual Abraham Lin-

coln Association Symposium.

During the 19th century, Washington had been raised to the level of an idol in the popular mind, well above all other presidents, Holzer said.

.."Getting right" with Washington" was an integral part of 19th-century politics, Holzer said, and, as an aspiring politician, Lincoln referred to his predecessor with piety.

Gradually, though, Lincoln began to see Washington as an example to be imitated. And, by the time he had been elected president, Lincoln even began to compare himself to Washington in public addresses.

"It took a major leap of faith, and perhaps of taste, to compare himself to Washington, and to say he faced a greater challenge than Washington did," Holzer said.

Lincoln did exactly that in the farewell speech he gave Springfield when he left for his inauguration, Holzer said, referring to facing a challenge "greater than that which

faced Washington." In the early years of the Civil War, Lincoln frequently compared himself to Washington in his speeches. But the popular press did not pick up on the analogy. Few commercial prints or other items were issued linking the two presidents, Holzer said. However, there was an increasing use of Lincoln's picture as a symbol of the country, he said.

"Washington was still the predominant American symbol, but Abraham Lincoln was beginning to catch up," Holzer said. "After Washington's birthday of 1862, Lincoln never

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LINCOLN AND HIS FAMILY.

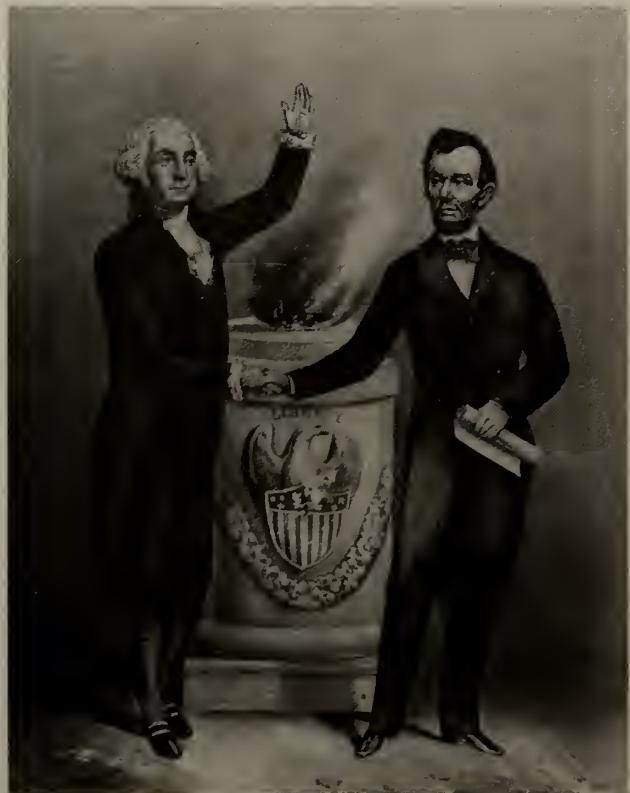
From the Louis A. Warren  
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## Expert: Lincoln's martyrdom made him an 'American god'

Abe also helped himself  
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"Washington was still the predominant American symbol, but Abraham Lincoln was beginning to catch up," Holzer said. "After Washington's birthday of 1862, Lincoln never publicly mentioned Washington again. He

didn't have to. He had supplanted the first American Revolution with the second American Revolution, and he became the icon himself."

Lincoln's assassination gripped the country. Holzer said as early as the Sunday after his death, some of the country were comparing him "Jesus, to Moses and to an American god (Washington), as well."

"Lincoln overnight was elevated into the realm of martyrdom," Holzer said. "No such catharsis had gripped the country since the death of Washington."

Prints showing Lincoln and Washington together began to flood the market, at prices ranging from \$7 to \$20.

"That's a pretty hefty sum in 1865," he said. The two dead presidents were typically

shown side by side, as equals, in the prints. Some fanciful versions showed them shaking hands, while others pictured Washington as welcoming Lincoln into an "exclusive American heaven."

"Washington and Lincoln emerged from the war as powerful and unique symbols of the country, the father and the savior of the country," Holzer said.

By the turn of the century, Lincoln came to be seen by the country as the dominant, more important partner, he said.

But the names of the two presidents remain bound together.

"Theodore Roosevelt once said that he did not know how any American could think of one of them without thinking of the other," Holzer said.







